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ABSTRACT

The requirements of urban sprawl, a highly industrialized and technical economy, and an unpredictable job market apply great pressure to the educational community for diversity of offerings, quality, and accountability. However, despite the extraordinary demands for programs and services, the economic forecast for higher education is pessimistic. The California community college system, consisting of 105 colleges, costing 1.5 billion dollars annually in state and local funds, serves as a model in many ways, especially as the one state system maintaining increasing enrollments and tuition-free education. The California system, following a period of explosive growth, is entering a new development phase requiring a fairly radical redefinition of purposes and goals. The Chancellor's office is currently working on a list of six major political influences which explain the need for finance reform and directly affect public policy decisions for the colleges: (1) the K-12 legacy and the "never-never land" between secondary and higher education; (2) the pervasive yet inconspicuous character of community colleges; (3) the inherent friction of a dual governance systems; (4) constituent diversity relative to the state legislature's makeup; (5) other educational components doing the community college job; and (6) piecemeal and partial solutions to financial problems. (TR)

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THE PROMISE AND THE PROBLEMS

OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN CALIFORNIA

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THE PROMISE AND THE PROBLEMS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN CALIFORNIA

Over a hundred years ago the federally initiated land grant act established a new segment of higher education aimed at providing practical courses to blue collar workers at low cost and accessible to all who chose to attend. This populist movement joined education with the people of the state in common purpose leading to unprecedented economic growth and opportunity, widening cultural interests and heightened social concern.

In recent years, the land grant colleges have moved toward the research university model, opting for graduate programs, greater selectivity of students, and higher costs. In the last ten to fifteen years the Community Colleges have inherited the mission of the land grant movement, namely, to make education accessible at the lowest possible cost to all who choose to attend. The Community College movement, in contrast to the federally initiated land grant policy, has been provided for by the states without benefit of substantial federal support. Equal opportunity for low income, minority, and disadvantaged students is a critical national policy which has been delegated to the Community Colleges.

The challenges to the Community Colleges today are much more complex than the needs of an agrarian economy of a hundred years ago. As the country moves to meet the modern requirements of urban sprawl, a highly industrialized and technical economy, and an unpredictable job market, a much greater pressure is applied to the educational community for diversity of offerings, quality, and accountability.

If the Community Colleges today are to contribute what the Land Grant Colleges did for rural America a century ago, our major emphasis should focus on urban problems. Urban grant legislation which involves the Community College as the key education component is needed.

These conditions have spawned a dramatic change in clientele demanding services from the Community Colleges. This demand to be "all things to all people" strains our ability to respond and our ability to pay. We continue to offer the common core of general studies for transfer purposes, at the same time providing the practical, short course, workshop, and two-year technical studies demanded of the society. Whereas, once most of our students were in a two-year program leading to a four-year transfer, now over 70% of our students are engaged in special vocational/technical programs in a wide variety of skills in a "lifelong learning" mode.

Simultaneously with these extraordinary demands for programs and service, the economic forecast for higher education is pessimistic. Steady state economy, taxpayers' revolt, a questioning public attitude concerning the value of education, coupled with concern about the costs of education, all form the base for current funding problems. As a result, the major issue facing the California Community Colleges is whether they will be able to continue to offer the diversity of programs demanded by the community with the highest possible quality accessible to the largest number of people. This is the challenge ahead. It is our responsibility as educators to inform the policy-makers of community and society's needs, the importance of continuing our public policy of access to educational opportunity for all citizens, to guarantee that the state's money is not wasted and that the state's appropriation is used for the purposes intended, that the system is efficient and accountable and whose priorities merit the confidence of the people.

There is much to be learned by all of us from an understanding of what has been happening with the California system -- this remarkable collection of 105 Community Colleges, costing a billion and one-half dollars annually in state and local funds, a national model in many ways and the one system of

higher education in California which continues to maintain increasing enrollments. And, as far as I know, the last remaining tuition-free system left in the country.

But the California Community College system because of its size, its complexity, its dramatic rise in enrollment, its sharp change in clientele to part-time adults, its transition from purely local support to substantial reliance upon state appropriations is probably now experiencing a new set of problems which the systems in some other states have not had to come to terms with, yet.

After a period of explosive growth, the California Community Colleges are entering a new phase in their development; one which is requiring a fairly radical redefinition of purposes and goals.

The construction phase, or capital growth period, if not over, has been slowed dramatically. There are many reasons for this -- the two major ones being a slowing down of enrollment pressure and a drying up of the state capital fund budgets due to national oil prices. Sixty new colleges were built during the last thirty years in addition to three thousand outreach locations, bringing the total replacement cost to from $2.8 to $3 billion. Another perspective on the growth explosion is illustrated in the enrollment figures showing an increase from six hundred sixty-five thousand (665,000) students to a million three hundred fifty thousand (1,350,000) over the last ten years.

The Characteristics of our changing student clientele have brought a new identity to the colleges.

Our success can no longer be measured by our transfer record to the four-year institutions. Other criteria are more indicative of our goals and missions, namely, what we do to improve low income, racial, and ethnic opportunity; our contribution to the labor force; what Community Colleges are doing to reduce unemployment, to provide needed skills, and to respond to the manpower needs of a rapidly changing industrial technology; our assistance and service to community human services and how we meet the requirements of the adult learner; how successful we are in promoting the concept of lifelong learning.

For the purposes of the rest of this paper we will bypass the internal policy decisions as to personnel and curriculum and examine instead the climate, circumstance, and character which may directly affect public policy decisions affecting California's Community Colleges. We are in urgent need of major financial reform.

The Chancellor's Office is currently working on a list of six major characteristics which explains the need for reform.

1. Our "K-12" legacy and the "never-never land" between secondary and higher education.

2. Our dual character: simultaneously pervasive and inconspicious.

3. The inherent friction of a dual governance system.

4. The diversity of our constituents and related makeup of the Legislature.

5. Others doing our work

6. Piecemeal-partial solutions.

First, K-12 Legacy. Like most Community Colleges in this country, we trace our origins to the early part of this century as extensions of secondary schools. While separate Community College districts were authorized in California as early as 1921, our major evolution and growth did not take place until after World War II.

We were formally designated as part of higher education in the 1960 California Master Plan for Higher Education. Until 1968, however, our state-level direction came via the State Board and Department of Education. We were and, to some extent, still are considered as part of a K-14 (Kindergarten through Grade 14) educational system. The separation from elementary and secondary schools (K-12), which began even prior to the creation of the Board of Governors in 1968, has been a slow and sometimes painful process. The result is that we've often assumed a position, particularly with respect to our handling by the news media, of being in a "never-never land" somewhere between K-12 and traditional higher education.

As recently as last year, the Governor and Legislature treated us as if our problems and solutions are characteristic of those in secondary schools, not colleges. Controls needed to curb explosive growth in adult education, largely in K-12, were extended to us without the needed variation.

By contrast, the California Postsecondary Education Commission typically treats our problems as if they were equivalent to those of the four-year institutions who, unlike ourselves, maintain rigorous admissions requirements, charge significant student fees, and serve a regional or statewide (sometimes

national and worldwide) clientele.

Recent Commission recommendations for the planning of colleges in Orange County are far more appropriate for four-year institutions than for two-year Community Colleges.

Among the few positive trends has been the recognition of (a) postsecondary, rather than just higher, education; (b) our changed mission by substituting the term Community for Junior; and (c) the need for lifelong learning.

Second, Pervasive but Inconspicous. Another irony is that we are at once pervasive and, at the same time, inconspicuous. On the one hand, we have 105 colleges and about 3,000 Outreach Centers enrolling more than 1,500,000 students. We formally enroll one of every eight California adults. If our community and other services are included, this ratio may be as low as one in every five. One can only wonder how many Californians have been served at one time or another by Community Colleges.

At the same time, however, we are quite inconspicuous. Statewide news media coverage of elementary and secondary problems, as well as those of the University and State University and Colleges, is far greater than that accorded Community Colleges. Local news coverage varies depending upon the political activity of locally-elected college trustees and public information efforts of staff.

This low profile can sometimes be a blessing. Campus disruptions of the late 1960's at the University appear to have resulted in meager budget increases for this institution during the first part of this decade. Our campuses, by contrast, were relatively calm during this time. Not altogether coincidentally, the same Administration and Legislature that pulled in the strings on the

University granted us, in 1973, the largest funding increase we had experienced in our history.

Our funding is split. Local support is roughly matched by the sum of state and federal aid, the later distributed primarily through students. These expenditures represent $1.5 billion this year. Even so, we constitute less than three percent of the state budget and, surprisingly, only about five percent of local property tax bills. Consequently, we receive relatively little consideration during budget deliberations at either level.

We tend to be swept along by other more obvious considerations. Earlier this decade, desires for property tax relief prompted the 1973 reform noted above, but only after K-12 and other local agencies had been similarly treated. The other recent major reform in 1976 was prompted largely by the need to control the explosive growth of secondary school adult education program.

Despite its size, most of the California State Budget is fixed by statute. Only a small portion is argued in the Legislative Budget Committees each year. Historically, the small variable portion, state employee salary adjustments, and school funding (including both K-12 and Community Colleges) surfaced each June as possible trade-offs. Some of the decisions made during the last hectic days of these budget sessions have been very counterproductive. Political factors totally unrelated to our operation have impacted us directly.

As I mentioned before, we are currently caught up in another wave of property tax relief efforts. An initiative ("Jarvis-Gann") will be before the state voters on June 6. This initiative came about largely because of Legislative inaction on property tax relief. While the Legislature recently acted, their statute must be ratified by the state's voters in a competing proposition on the same June Ballot as the Jarvis-Gann initiative.

The latter has a high probability of passing. What if it does? The impact on Community Colleges would vary, depending on a variety of unique local circumstances. In all cases, however, college programs would be reduced or eliminated. In some cases, colleges might have to close. Most certainly, new legislation will be introduced hurriedly. Most certainly, with the favorable vote on the tax initiative, the message will be heard loud and clear by the Legislature, and it will be a safe bet that no new revenue bills will be introduced.

The Governor, our Board, the State Board for K-12, and many other groups are opposed to the initiative. Unfortunately, the trade-offs between the initiative and the legislative solution are not obvious and, likely, will elude most voters. An enormous public information program about these two options is in order. Once again, our future is dependent upon decisions about problems not of our own making.

Third, Dual State/Local Governance. Another factor influencing the politics of finance is the inherent friction between state and local agents due to our dual system of governance. At the state level, we are to provide leadership and direction for orderly college growth. The law also requires us to maintain local autonomy in the management of these colleges.

There is a state board appointed by the Governor and seventy locally-elected trustee boards, each managing a district. This is a strong and effective arrangement. However, finance reform proposals which endanger a special

interest or particular district are typically opposed under the broad rubric of "eroding local autonomy." More than 90% of the state-level funds we distribute to districts is determined by reasonably objective formulas. This helps maintain local autonomy. Often, however, broad policy proposals require categorical project or program funding for their achievement. Greater use of categorical funding also encounters the local automony issue.

Fourth, Diversity of our Constituents. Our constituents are quite diverse. Each of the seventy local district boards has its own set of problems and agenda. These districts range in size and character from the six million person, urban Los Angeles district to the rural, sparsely populated Lassen district in the northeastern part of the state.

While all districts have the same basic postsecondary mission, they go about this mission in seventy different ways -- each related to the unique needs of its community and service area. Formula approaches to funding cannot always capture this diversity. Categorical aids observe the diversity, but may reduce local autonomy, an interesting dilemma.

Related to these problems is the makeup of the State Legislature. Los Angeles controls about one-third of the votes in the State Assembly. Reforms which may be beneficial for most of the seventy districts but adversely affect Los Angeles have little chance of being adopted. Four large urban districts: Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Peralta exert enormous influence in the legislative process, even to the point of employing their own lobbyists.

On the other hand, many of our small rural districts have enjoyed considerable success lobbying specific capital outlay budget projects through the Finance committees of the State Senate.

We also attempt to consider the often disparate preferences of our four interest groups: trustees, administrators, faculty, and students. It seems that these disparaties have been accentuated to some degree with the advent of collective bargaining.

Faculty groups such as the California Federation of Teachers and California Teachers Association are engaged in a fierce competition to be the bargaining units for faculty. The latter organization, despite recent publicity about its financial status, exerts considerable influence in the State Legislature.

We have what may be the most elaborate system in the country of soliciting input on finance policy issues from all segments of our constituency. Five faculty organizations, the trustees, two student organizations, several groups representing administrators, and the California version of the national Community and Junior College Association all employ extensive and, frequently, effective lobbying efforts. Previous finance reforms experienced difficulty when one or more of these groups were opposed to a proposal. Generally, we can expect these groups to take different positions on finance proposals affecting the utilization of college staff resources.

Fifth, Others Doing our Work. Our relationships with other state-level agencies are somewhat confused. In the past, the Department of Finance and the Postsecondary Education Commission often have assumed our (Board and Chancellor's Office) functions, particularly when they felt we weren't doing our job.

The Commission (and predecessor agency) had studied our finance structure three times and duplicates most of our review of proposed new Community Colleges and programs. The Department of Finance has initiated two major finance reforms this decade and each year duplicates our detailed review of proposed college

capital outlay projects. Some of this duplication is necessary while other of it is counterproductive. In any event, we seem to have been in a reactive mode to finance proposals whose origin is only indirectly related to our problems and needs.

No one represents postsecondary education on the Governor's Cabinet, and this Governor has not (in contrast to his predecessors) employed an education advisor. In our case, this role has been assumed by the Department of Finance. The Department basically oversees the State General Fund while assisting in the construction and management of the Governor's Budget. Consequently, most of the policy proposals and decisions emanating from the Department have undergone analysis of the cost but not the benefit aspect of the problem.

The process for Community Colleges, therefore, tends to be unbalanced and unlike that afforded other goods and services supported by California State Government.

Sixth, Piecemeal-Partial Solutions. We've submitted finance proposals almost every year in an effort to make improvements and get away from techniques we inherited from K-12 but which are not appropriate for our operations. Due to timing and politics, these proposals typically are narrowly drawn and quite pragmatic, conditioned by their salability.

We now have an extensive patchwork of finance statutes which is not totally logical or consistent. A major reworking is needed.

Future Strategy. What does all this suggest for future finance reform strategy? Several lessons are obvious.

First, we must ourselves initiate a comprehensive look at our fiscal problems.

To accomplish this, my office is undertaking a year-long, in-depth study of the entire set of problems which confront us in the area of finance.

Second, solutions should be long-term. We don't want to have to return in the following year to undo the results of this effort.

Third, we must be concerned about preserving local autonomy, particularly because some solutions may involve greater use of categorical aids and fewer objective formulas.

Fourth, if solutions require significant changes, we may need to phase them over a period of years so as not to disrupt district budgets.

Fifth, if we're to sell our solutions, we must establish a coalition of our constituents as early in the study as possible. To accomplish this, we've constructed a comprehensive advisory structure which, hopefully, represents all of the affected and interested parties: trustees, students, faculty, administrators, general public, and state-level agencies, including the Legislature. The study will assess all feasible alternatives. From these we hope to construct a useful consensus proposal that will have broad support.

Sixth, the study must be accompanied, at least in its final stages, by an energetic public information effort. We need to do a better job of advertising our fiscal needs as well as our mission and identity. This component was neglected in prior finance reform efforts and contributed significantly to our failure to secure desired legislation.

In conclusion, citizens task groups to study and examine the relationship between State Government and the Community Colleges are recommended. Critical problems should be identified in that relationship and governing principles that

would characterize an improved relationship suggested.

Suggestions should be made as to the kind of continuing arrangements to monitor the relationship, to identify frictions as they arise, and develop coping mechanisms to improve the arrangement.

In a human society which has become legalistic, too complex for centralized management, unreasonable in its expectations of elected and appointed leadership, financially over-extended and highly politicized, it is an interesting and even disturbing fact that the academic man (woman) holds in very low esteem the areas of administration, of management, of politics, of leadership. This aversion is consciously or unconsciously communicated to his/her students. John Gardner has pointed out that this aversion insures that in the generations to come his society will be even less well equipped to accomplish intentional change.

We cannot wait for the day to come when these complex processes become everywhere respected. The academic community must, in my opinion, face up to the need for political awareness and expertise. We have in the past decade made noteworthy strides in administrative and management recognition and practice. The word "politics" still has a generally distasteful flavor.

In closing, I would like to quote from T. R. McConnell and his cogent book on Redistribution of Power in Higher Education.

> "Legislative and executive departments of government are exercising greater control over a wide range of institutional affairs which affect the prerogatives of governing boards, administrators, faculties, and students.

"In the process, some hard won and never fully secure rights and privileges may be lost. The redistribution of power in higher education will not proceed smoothly or even amicably; a long period of turbulence, and even conflict, is in prospect. The great acts of leadership and statesmanship on the part of administrators and faculty will be those which turn contention and conflict of interest into shared purpose and concerted efforts to attain them."

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